

Thomas Joseph Schomp  
November 16, 1956  
Persian Gulf War  
Navy  
Chief Petty Officer  
Veterans History Project  
Library of Congress

Maddie: Today is Saturday, February 26, 2011, and we are interviewing Thomas Schomp at his home. Mr. Schomp is 54 years old and was born on November 16, 1956. Our names are Madeline Brewer, and this is Elizabeth Schomp, and we are the interviewers. Thomas Schomp is Beth's dad and I'm a family friend.

Maddie: What war and branch of service did you serve in?

Mr. Schomp: I served in the United States Navy.

Maddie: What was your rank?

Mr. Schomp: When I retired, I was a Chief Petty Officer.

Maddie: Where did you serve?

Mr. Schomp: I served in several locations. Both coasts, *USS Constellation*, *USS Kitty Hawk*, Fleet Training center San Diego, *USS Wasp*, SIMA (Short Intermediate Maintenance Activity), AMPHIB Group 2, and Atlantic Fleet.

Beth: When and where were you born?

Mr. Schomp: I was born in Teaneck, New Jersey, November 16, 1956.

Beth: Did you have any siblings?

Mr. Schomp: Yeah, I'm the oldest of seven.

Maddie: Big Family.

Beth: What was it like growing up with a large family?

Mr. Schomp: Chaos, utter chaos. It was a lot of fun. There was never a dull moment.

Maddie: That's good.

Beth: I can see. What did you do before the military?

Mr. Schomp: When I got out of high school, I went into cooking. I cooked for four years, and while I was cooking I volunteered at the local fire department.

Beth: Did anyone else in your family serve in the military?

Mr. Schomp: Yes, my dad served in Korea, and I had one brother who served in the Navy also.

Maddie: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Mr. Schomp: I enlisted, volunteered.

Maddie: Was there any specific reason why?

Mr. Schomp: I've been cooking for four years, and I couldn't see myself doing it for a living. The guy who was a recruiter, Bob Evens, he was also a volunteer at the fire department, and we were always talking about it. It ended up just being the right thing to do. It offered a lot of opportunities for education, to go see places, and I guess the biggest thing was to serve my country.

Maddie: Why did you enlist in the Navy other than any other branch of military?

Mr. Schomp: I think they had more to offer. I didn't want to be a ground pounder; I didn't want to go into the Army for that reason, or the Marines. The Air Force, there wasn't a whole lot of chances for advancement, and the Navy offered you better chances to see the world, and go different places. Pretty much that's why I chose it.

Maddie: How long have you been in the Navy?

Mr. Schomp: I served 22 years and seven days.

Maddie: Seven days. Seven days count. What was your training like?

Mr. Schomp: Boot camp was really intense. It was a rude awakening, especially that first morning after getting there. The company commanders, the guys who were in charge of us while going through boot camp, came in, and it was just like on TV. They came in kicking garbage cans, making a bunch of noise, yelling and screaming get up, get up, move it, move it, move your bleeps, you know that type of thing. So, yeah it was pretty intense. While in boot camp, I ended up being in a special company. We had the honor guard, the choir, and the band, and I ended up being in the choir. So, I definitely missed out on some of the fun things like guys did like going through the gas chamber, getting gassed.

Maddie: Fun?

Mr. Schomp: Yeah, we did a lot of marching. Everything was march here march there, a lot of PT-ing, physical training, exercising, running. That was pretty much it. Then, you went to your A school. Your A school taught you a lot about what field you went into. It taught me tools, uses, which I already had a great idea of, and gave you a basic background of what you'll be doing.

Maddie: Where did you train?

Mr. Schomp: Boot camp was Great Lakes, Illinois. During boot camp, we went to the NTC, which was the training center for our class A, B, or C schools. Training was basically through the entire stay in the military. You were training for something everyday. I went to school several times for different things, but training never stopped. Whether it was survival training, training on how to repair and operate equipment, preparing for different watch stations that were required on the ship, surface warfare pins, training never stopped.

Beth: Oh my gosh.

Maddie: That would be a lot.

Beth: That would be a lot of training.

Mr. Schomp: Well yeah, just as bad as being in school.

Beth: What was it like adjusting to military life?

Mr. Schomp: It was a culture shock. Boot camp was a culture shock. Going from the confines of your home, Mom and Dad, to being ordered around by a couple commanders and the regiment that you had. You ate breakfast at a certain time; you ate lunch at a certain time, dinner at a certain time. You had classes that you went to for specific times. Just, very regimented, you went to be at specific time. They told you when you went to bed, and you had to learn how to stand watches. So, it was an eye opener. If you were open minded, you adjusted to it very well. A lot of people had trouble adjusting to it. You learned. You learned to deal with it.

Beth: Where did you serve, and where are the different places that you've been?

Mr. Schomp: Boot camp was Great Lakes, Illinois. From there I went to *USS Constellation CV-64*. It was an air craft carrier, and I was stationed outside of San Diego, made a deployment on her. I came back and went to school, and then I went on the *USS Kitty Hawk CV-63*, another air craft carrier. When I reported on her, we went up to Birmingham, Washington to a naval ship yard for an upgrade upkeep where they did a lot of repairs. Upgrades to living quarters and things like that. Then I deployed on her for a year. After the *Kitty Hawk* I went to Fleet Training Center San Diego where I was an instructor. After the Fleet Training Center, I went on the *USS Wasp*. I went to their pre-commissioning unit first, and then once you commissioned the ship you were basically

assigned to a ship then. It was *lhd-1 USS Wasp*. From the *Wasp* I went to SIMA Norfolk, SIMA being Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity. I was in charge of the boiler repair shop, and I had thirty guys working for me, that where we would go out on the waterfront and repair different parts and pieces of ships. After that, I went to AMPHIB Group 2, which was Amphibious Assault Group. I was a trainer; I would go out and train the amphibious assault ships, the different ships that were assigned to the group, and engineering casualty control, record keeping, history of the wars, that type of thing. After that I went to Commander Afloat Training Atlantic, which was basically the same thing. We would go out, but instead of amphibious assault ships where you transported Marines, we would do all the gas turbines, destroyers, cruisers, and aircraft carriers. We would go out and train and drill a ship's company to make sure that they were ready for deployment over seas.

Beth: What's your favorite place that you've been?

Mr. Schomp: Countries that I've been to. I have been to Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, Jamaica, Columbia South America, Rhoads Greece; Haifa, Israel, Rome, Italy; Palma De Majorca; Toulon, France; Spain, and the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Indian oceans, the Arabian Sea.

Maddie: When you were gone, did you have to wear you're uniform, at all?

Mr. Schomp: Yes. Some countries that we went to we had to wear our dress blues, or dress uniforms. When I was a petty officer, first class, that was the uniform I wore. It was the cracker jacks, dress blues. But most of the countries that you went to you were just allowed to go out in civilian clothes. But your civilian clothes had to be neat, pressed; you know no holes, no derogatory sayings or anything like that. Pretty much what you guys have to wear in school.

Beth: Out of all the places you've been, what's your favorite?

Mr. Schomp: That's a tough one. I'm going to have to do it by coast, because when I was on the west coast I would have to say my favorite was going to... Did I say Australia earlier? Perth. I went to, we were in Freemantle Australia. And the reason why it was a favorite there was because I went into one of the local establishments and got to talking with some of the old timers that were there. And they started with their if it wasn't for you yanks in WWII we'd be speaking Japanese, this, that, and the other thing. So they were really appreciative of, you know, the military. I mean the people of Australia were. It was just unreal what they did. They opened up their houses to us. They would come by and pick you up, take you out to dinner, or have dinner with the family, or something like that. And then some of the tours that you could do, go see into the outback, go into the city of Perth. Just really great. Off the east coast, I would probably say my favorite one was Palma De Majorca. That's where the King of Spain's summer palace is, very pretty island. The water is beautiful. Some of the local, the church, the one church there was absolutely beautiful. The stained glass and how large it was. They had an old castle that

you could go up in and tour. Beaches. Beaches were beautiful. I would probably say that Palma was my favorite.

Beth: What was your least favorite?

Mr. Schomp: My least favorite would probably have to be the Philippines. When we went into Olongapo in the Philippines, it's, the city of Olongapo very rundown. It was... It was not... The Philippines are a third world country, and their houses, establishments, you know, they were nothing that you've ever seen, other than maybe on TV. Their ... I don't know. It was just a very poor country, and it was evident in their living conditions.

Maddie: What ships were you on?

Mr. Schomp: There were a lot. I was stationed on board the USS Constellation that was my first command. The *USS Kitty Hawk* that was my second, the *USS Wasp* that was my third. As far as different ships that I was on, I was part of the Amphibious Squadron 2, the Atlantic fleet, the training commands. I was on your LPH's, your LPD's. Those were landing assault ships that carried the marines and the helicopters, just like the Wasp. I was on destroyers, your Arleighburke classes, your cruisers, and your CG's. Like I said, the different carriers, other oilers and mission ships. I was on those when you'd go out and do training.

Maddie: On each ship that you were on what position did you hold on the ship?

Mr. Schomp: *Constellation*, my first one I was a, what they called a burner man. I worked down between the boilers, and we would put in and take out the burners for producing steam for the engine. There were several different positions that I held on each one, but the burner man was the most prominent one on the *Constellation*. On the *Kitty Hawk*, I got up to top watch. A top watch would be in charge of any engineering space. He had a machines mate and a boiler technician. A machine mate was in charge of the main engine. The boiler technician was in charge of the boiler and all its support equipment. So I became the top watch, and the top watch over saw, depending on what side of the house you were on, at least five or six people, making sure that they were doing their jobs out in the space, and in turn that I was in contact with the engineering officer of the watch, who was telling me what he expected from me. So I ran the main space when I was on board the *Kitty Hawk*. When I was on board the *Wasp* I was the engineering officer of the watch. I would deal directly with the captain up on the bridge, and then I would relay his orders to the other two main spaces where the top watches were standing their watches. So I was an engineering officer of the watch, I was in charge of all engineering spaces; both main propulsion plants, the auxiliary spaces, and all the support groups on board the ship. And I would be coordinating all of that. If I needed to get somebody to go fix something or stopping and locking, coordinating drills, that type of thing. Those were my afloat commands. When I was at Fleet Training Center, San Diego I was an instructor, and I would probably say that being an instructor was my favorite. While there, I taught maintenance procedures for pumps and valves. There's all sorts pumps and valves, different classes that you have on board all the

different ships. But there's nothing more rewarding than when I'm teaching one of the enlisted guys coming through the class, that when you see the light come on and "Oh, Damn. I understand what you're trying to tell me. I understand what it is now." You know, that was the most rewarding thing that was when I was an instructor. SIMA, Norfolk, I was over in the boiler repair shop. I had like 25-30 guys working for me, and we would be going up and down the water front to all different classes of ships doing all sorts of repairs on boilers, heat exchangers, that type of thing, incinerators, replacing tubes, rerolling tubes, doing brick work for the boilers, making repairs for the inspectors that came through. And then after that, when I was at the Squadron Atlantic Fleet, we would go out on the different ships and when we would be inspecting them making sure that they would be meeting the minimum requirements for record keeping, that type of thing. We were training them if they weren't, and then we would train them on operations, casualty control drills. We would board a ship, and we would initiate a drill, and they would have to react to it. They would go from you know, like plugging pipes that might've sprung leaks to securing the border because there was a fuel leak or a ruptured tube, go through the entire scenario and then they would have to recover from that they would have to relight the boiler off, or restart the main engine, or a piece of equipment to bring it back to normal operating conditions, and then we would initiate another drill. We would do main space fires, we would go down and we would have lights that would flicker and have smoke and machines that would pretend it was a fire and they would have to combat the fire, and the whole ship would go to general quarters, to do this. So that was a lot of fun. It was a challenging job. They were all challenging.

Maddie: What was the purpose of each ship?

Mr. Schomp: The carriers, the air craft carriers were for deploy to supply air support. We had, while I was on board, we had the F-14's, F-18's, the Prowlers. The 14's and 18's were combat air craft. The Prowlers were bombers. We had the helicopters. We had CH-46's, CH-53's, for moving people about, and we had the e-wax. Those were the eye in the sky, the ones that had the big flat dome on them. The dome would fly around and just maintain surveillance over the fleet, looking for hostiles, that type of thing. On the *Wasp*, she was an Amphibious Assault Ship. What she did, she carried a contingent of marines on board, and we had the helicopters that we could fly them in on, we had L-cats which were landing craft assault. Basically those were the ones that floated on the cushion of air, and they basically flew across the water, and we would bring for deploy marines to the hot spots and drop them off and pick them up when needed.

Maddie: Anything special happen on any of the ships that pop out in your mind?

Mr. Schomp: We were on the *USS Kitty Hawk* and playing war games and late one night we actually had a Russian submarine, I won't say surface, but it came up to near the surface and collided with us or, is what they said. But we ended up with a, I think, it was a seventy foot gash in our hull on the forward starboard side. And in that gash, when we got back to the Philippines, they found a piece of the Russian submarine's propeller and of course that got sent off for analysis and what not by the navy department, but we got to keep a piece of it and they made a plaque out of it, and they kept it on, where I'm going

to say the quarter deck was in a glass case that had all the you know, ships awards and what not in it, and they stuck it in there. But that was one, and I want to say that being part of commissioning the *USS Wasp LHD-1*. First ship in a class gets subject to all sorts of tests, and what not. And the neatest one was, or scariest one, was shock trials. They took us down off the coast of Florida, and what they did was a tug would tow basically a 10,000 pound bomb in the water and we did the trials, the shock trials three times. They started out so far, then the next one was closer, and then the last one was close enough that the spray from the explosion, the detonation, was basically washing the ship over with spray from the explosion. And it's just like it is in the movies where you hear, you would hear a click and all of a sudden it's just like an explosion, and as soon as you heard the explosion the ship was rocking, everything was swaying; dust was coming down out of the overhead. And it was a pretty, a real eye opener, and scared the crap out of me.

Maddie: We see.

Mr. Schomp: It was really interesting; I thought we had brought down a picture. Did we?

Beth: No, we left it upstairs.

Mr. Schomp: Oh, ok. Yeah, but those were probably the most two most interesting things that I remember.

Beth: What was going through your head when the submarine struck the Kitty Hawk?

Mr. Schomp: Actually, the... We were all asleep, or I meant those of us who were not on watch were asleep. And I was up in my rack and initially it felt like a speed bump. It was like the ship hit a speed bump. But then as soon as that happened the ship went to general quarters, and we had to all go man our battle stations, and basically what we were doing as a result was investigating for damage, trying to see if we could find out if there was any damage to the ship, or what we found out was that were the propeller pierced our hull that we were leaking jet fuel out and water levels, the levels of the tanks were coming up because of that. So, it was pretty scary. I mean you really didn't know what was going on, you just felt the bump and then general quarters and wasn't until after the fact that we found out it was a Russian sub that we had run into, or run into us.

Maddie: Was the collisions, you said it was about the war games. What are war games?

Mr. Schomp: War games. We were over there. We were with, and it would've been like Korea's navy. Of course several of our ships, our submarines, I think the Australians might've been a part of it. But what they do, they pretty much have every deployment there was always some type of interaction between different countries navy's to simulate war games: working together, what you would do, responsibilities, that type of thing.

Maddie: So they purposely ran into you, or was it an accident?

Mr. Schomp: No, it was an accident.

Beth: What was it like when the *Wasp* was commissioned, besides the shock trials?

Mr. Schomp: They don't consider a ship alive until she's commissioned. And we were in Norfolk, Virginia when that happened. What they do... It's a big to do. They have guest speakers. They had several retirees, veterans that served on board previous *Wasps* there, dignitaries, the admirals, and you know just a bunch of people. But what they did, they have the crew on the pier and at some point during the ceremony they say they're bringing the ship alive, and when they do that the crew runs aboard the ship. The ship's whistle is blowing. The radars are going. The armament is exercising swinging back and forth, and basically you man the rail. It was pretty impressive to watch. My mom and dad, an aunt and uncle of mine were all there to see it. It was pretty good.

Beth: What wars have you been involved in?

Mr. Schomp: I was in during the Desert Storm, Desert Shield, and the... What's the one that we were talking about earlier?

Beth: Persian Gulf.

Mr. Schomp: Persian Gulf, ok. Yeah.

Maddie: Yeah, all mixed in there.

Beth: Were you in any conflicts, or did you see any action?

Mr. Schomp: Being in the Navy, personally no. But as far as on the carriers, we were supplying air support, but I was in engineering and basically I was below the main deck. I wasn't up on the flight deck. You know with the planes or anything like that. The closest I got to it was the crow's nest, to be able look at and watch the sorties take off and coming in and landing, that was probably the closest we got to it. We were pretty much over the horizon as far as involvement went.

Beth: What was your highest rank?

Mr. Schomp: My highest rank as an enlisted person was Chief Petty Officer E-7.

Beth: How did you get that rank?

Mr. Schomp: Through starting out as an E-1 up to E-7. Your advancements are based on testing. They test your knowledge and if you score in the top five percent or whatever the percentage happens to be for that exam, you would either pick it up or you wouldn't. When you went to Chief Petty Officer, not only did you have to go and take an exam, you have to go in front of a review board, and the review board would look at your records, your past commands, your history basically and see what you had done that was making



you stand out to see if you were you know, warranted being advanced to Chief Petty Officer.

Maddie: Your book here, was that, the book?

Mr. Schomp: This is, when I went, when I was selected to become Chief Petty Officer. There is an initiation. Part of the initiation is that they give you this book, and you have to basically guard it with your life. You cannot let anybody take it from you or anything like that, but you have to go around to the different senior people, your peers and get them to sign it and write stuff in it about you. Well, you can look at it and see that somebody got a hold of it and there's a lot of derogatory comments. There's a lot of doodling. Somebody even took the time out to take a drill and drill holes in it, you know to help dress it up. But yeah, it was an interesting time. And along with the, along with this, they have an initiation, I had to dress up as a, as the Jolly Green Giant. So I had an outfit on, I even had a, I was like a cross between the Jolly Green Giant and an elf, because I had a little bag with pixie dust, you know sparkly stuff to throw around at the guys. You know it was just.

Maddie: Like a fraternity.

Mr. Schomp: Yeah, it was like getting initiated into a fraternity or anything along those lines. It was a lot of fun. It was challenging, but it was a lot of fun, and they really did a lot of mind games with you as far as that went. But, yeah.

Maddie: Sounds like fun to be in.

Beth: Oh, yeah.

Maddie: Some of the drilled paper got on your pants.

Mr. Schomp: Yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was like when you cross the equator. They initiate you. Before you cross the equator, if you haven't done it, you're considered a pollywog, across the equator you become a wog. It's an initiation thing; it's like when you go above the North Atlantic as far as a blue nose, a dolphin. You can cross the time line and become a, no it's a pollywog you become a shell back, and then you can become a golden shell back if you cross the equator and the International Date Line at 00 and be a golden shell back.

Maddie: During your military time, did you ever get injured on the job?

Mr. Schomp: I got burned several times, but nothing of any significance.

Maddie: That's a good thing.

Beth: That is.

Maddie: How did you keep in touch with your family?

Mr. Schomp: Early on it was pretty much just mail, snail mail. Write a letter, send it home, and wait for a reply. As I was, as I got closer to when I retired, they had basically radio phones on board the ship that you could use, if you needed to. And as I was coming out, they were doing e-mails, starting to do e-mails, video chats you were able to do that, that type of thing. When you were in port, you could always use a land line and call home if you wanted to.

Maddie: How did it feel to be away from home for so long?

Mr. Schomp: Early on, it really didn't matter. I mean I didn't have, I wasn't married so I was single. I didn't have anybody waiting for me at home when we pulled back in. It was, I guess it got a little rough at times. You know, when you watch everybody else who had family on the pier. Whether it was mom, dad, brother, sister, wife, or husband, you know and kids waiting. I mean later on when I was on the *Wasp*; it was nice having somebody there, a girlfriend.

Maddie: How did it feel to come back? Having to adjust back to normal life hard?

Mr. Schomp: No, it was a harder adjustment when you went in than it was when you came back. You were still assigned to commands, still had daily duties, you had to do twenty-four hour duty, and duty weekends. You never really got all that far away from the ship and its life style. And when I was on shore duty, I still had to stand watches. It wasn't as frequent, but you still had to stand you know watches and duty sections, and spend the night, that type of thing.

Beth: Did you receive any awards while in the Navy?

Mr. Schomp: I received you know, like conducts, good conduct award. I've had several of those, an Engineering award from when I was on board the *Wasp*. Navy achievement, there's several that I received, Navy Expeditionary, Asia campaign, you know, South East Asia.

Beth: Do you still keep in touch with any old Navy buddies?

Mr. Schomp: Unfortunately, no. There were a couple early on, but I guess just like anything else, because they're not around, you drift apart. Every once in a while you get the text, you know, the e-mail, or the phone call. But it's far and few between.

Beth: Are you a part of any veteran organizations?

Mr. Schomp: I belong to the local VFW.

Beth: Ok, and are there any regrets? Would you go back and do it all again? Would you change anything?

Mr. Schomp: No. No regrets. I would do it all again. I probably saw and did more in the military than I probably would've had I not joined. I mean, honestly, if I hadn't joined, I don't think I would've seen all the countries that I saw, been to all the different places, taste all the different cultures, experience it. And I wouldn't have gotten the education that I have. I was able to take my military training and go right into a job out in town. I've been doing it for ten years now. I went and I work for a power plant, power producer. And basically everything that I learned in the military, I am still using today in my civilian life, and I'm grateful for that. I think that the biggest thing was the pride from serving our country and knowing that what I was doing was keeping family and friends and individuals that I didn't even know live the dream.

Maddie: Did being in the military change you as a person at all?

Mr. Schomp: I would probably have to say yeah. It taught you discipline, how to work with people, close quarters with people, respect authority. Taught me how to be a leader, yeah, just taught me a lot.

Beth: What is the point of this article? I see you in that picture there.

Mr. Schomp: That was on board the *USS Constellation*, and I don't know if you can see it but this is Master Chief Creech. Master Chief Creech was probably all of four foot nothing and being 6'8"-6'9" there's a little bit of difference in height, and of course you know the overhead was a little low. And you can see it's kind of causing me to bend over and look down on him. It was just a story, a funny picture just to lighten up being on a cruise. It was taken during that time frame.

Maddie: So now were done.

Beth: Yes.

Maddie: So thank you for having an interview with us so we can put it in the Library of Congress forever and ever.

Beth: Thank you and thank you for your served time.

Maddie: Yes, we very much appreciate what you've done that we can have a free life.

Mr. Schomp: Well, thank you for taking an interest in what I did.

Beth & Maddie: You're Welcome.